

TRUMP'S RELIGIOUS LIBERTY REFORMS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on public policy reforms issued by the Trump administration on January 16:

The public policy reforms governing religious liberty issued by the Trump administration are compelling and much needed. President Trump has proven once again that he is the most religion-friendly president in the modern era.

The Trump administration has provided a much-needed corrective to the draconian directives promulgated by the previous administration: the role of religious liberty under President Obama was diminished to such an extent that it all but neutered the free exercise of religion in public policy programs. Trump has reversed this condition, awarding religious liberty the kind of breathing room it deserves, both morally and legally.

There are three areas of public policy affecting religious liberty that have been targeted for reform by the Trump administration: faith-based programs; higher education; and religious institutions.

While the directives that have been issued are tailored to each of these three sectors, there are two elements that are common to all of them: religious institutions will not be afforded a second-class status any longer and their autonomy will be protected.

The Trump administration wants to end the invidious practices of discriminating against religious institutions and associations that were instituted by the Obama administration. Any institution that does not treat religious institutions as the equal of secular institutions will be faced with the

prospect of having federal funds terminated.

Religious autonomy is another feature of these reforms. For instance, the state cannot force religious associations to jettison their religious character as a condition of federal aid. Regrettably, this has been done, the effect of which has been to secularize these entities. What is the sense of having a religious institution if it cannot freely exercise its religious prerogatives?

In effect, the Trump administration is going to continue its efforts to put an end to the animus against religious institutions that characterized the Obama administration.

As is customary, the public is being given 30 days to comment on these proposals. I will submit a detailed account of the Catholic League's problems with the Obama administration in its handling of faith-based programs, and the need for the kinds of reforms as outlined in the new directives. We will make public our input.